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MISSISSIPPI FORESTRY COMMISSION

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Forestry Commission Intensifies Forest Management on School Trust Lands

Jackson, MS-- Over the past year, the Mississippi Forestry Commission has been collecting field data from the trees and forests growing on School Trust Lands across the state. Now, the commission is using that data in preparing the first, statewide, comprehensive, forest assessment of this state-owned land, totaling approximately 480,000 acres. Information from the assessment, combined with applying more intensive timber management practices, will lead to increased timber sale revenues, according to the Forestry Commission.

“Revenue generated from School Trust Lands is used by local public school districts to enhance the educational experience of their students,” said Charlie Morgan, State Forester of the Mississippi Forestry Commission.

“Our goal is to maximize timber sale revenue by applying a more intensive timber management process,” said Morgan. “The potential to increase revenue amounts by 50% exists, and we intend to make it happen for the local school districts and the children attending those schools.”

The Forestry Commission is charged by state law to manage forested School Trust Lands, commonly referred to as Sixteenth Section lands located in 67 counties. The Secretary of State’s Office has general supervisory authority over all state-owned lands. The two agencies recently signed a memorandum of understanding that outlines their responsibilities in advancing the management of School Trust Lands to a higher level.

According to Morgan, the revenue from timber sales on School Trust Lands in Fiscal Year 2008 was \$20.5 million. By applying more intensive forest management practices, especially on soils already producing quality pine and hardwood timber, the Forestry Commission sees the potential to raise timber-generated revenues to \$30 million per year. The increase could be even more depending on favorable markets.

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The need to conduct the assessment, or re-inventory, of the trust lands was evident following Hurricane Katrina. The statewide re-inventory, combined with the use of new technology and computer software, will produce a comprehensive, statewide overview of the forest resource on School Trust Lands and a schedule of harvest volumes that can be managed at a sustained level on an annual basis.

The federal funding allocated to Mississippi for hurricane recovery efforts provided the financial support that significantly advanced the Forestry Commission's level of technology, at no cost to the state. Two unique products were created specifically for the Forestry Commission: a Geographical Information System (GIS) application called SIMSMap (Spatial Information Management System) and a computer-driven forest management plan developer called PlanWriter. The commission is also using a harvest scheduler called Woodstock, which takes data from SIMSMap and creates a statewide harvest plan that foresters will use when carrying out forest management activities from one year to the next. The Forestry Commission is now recognized as a forest technology leader among other southern state and federal forestry agencies.

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